

Interview Transcript

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Interviewee: Sister Brenda Lau

Interviewer: Shannon Green, Director, CSJ Institute, Mount Saint Mary's University; Sean Gary, Kelby Thwaits, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University.

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Transcribed By: Nancy Steinmann

[00:00:00.00] [Director's comments]

[00:00:15.27] SHANNON GREEN: It's Mount Saint Mary's University, CSJ Oral History Project, filming at Carondelet Center, on October 23--

[00:00:24.02] [Director's comments]

[00:00:46.02] SHANNON GREEN: Okay, October 23, 2017, Shannon Green interviewing Sister Brenda Lau.

[00:00:53.28] SHANNON GREEN: Sister Brenda, would you start us off by just stating your full name and your age.

[00:00:58.00] SISTER BRENDA LAU: My full name is Sister Brenda Lau, and I am currently seventy-four years old.

[00:01:06.17] SHANNON GREEN: Sister Brenda, would you just tell us a little bit about your childhood and your family--what you remember from growing up?

[00:01:13.05] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Well I'd be happy to describe my childhood to you. I was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, St. Francis Hospital, which is no longer now--it's a skilled nursing facility and looking towards an assisted living and independent living. Construction is still going on. And I was born of humble parents. My dad is Chinese and my mother is a mixture of Spanish, Italian, Puerto Rican and American Indian. So I am what we call in Hawaii "chop suey". [laughs]. And I grew up in a--kind of a housing project in those days. The government workers, which my dad was, provided housing for government workers. So we began that way and then I'm one of two in the family--I am the eldest. My brother is three and a half years younger. And we moved to another home when my grandparents passed away--whom I really did not know, because all of them were deceased except for one before I was born. And the last grandparent was--when she died I was only two and a half years old. So--but we moved to the family house that was there for a few years. But we had my father, my mother, the two children, my father's two brothers and a sister in a three bedroom house. So it was quite full. So my father and mother both worked to try to move us to another home. So when I was about twelve years old we moved to what was known as Alewa Heights, which was kind of on a mountain there in Honolulu. And I went to the local Catholic elementary school in the area.

[00:03:04.22] SHANNON GREEN: Was your family very religious?

[00:03:06.20] SISTER BRENDA LAU: You know, my dad was Buddhist. And until I went to school--my mother was Catholic--and he respected my mother's wishes that we go to Catholic school. So my mother put us in St. Teresa's school in Honolulu--it was a Catholic school. And it was--when I

was about third grade that my dad started to come around. I had some religious activities I remember in particular. He had to help me build a little shrine for May Day or something out of crepe paper and a box. And it was--in my little mind, when I look back--it seemed like that was the turning point. But my mother also had cousins that kind of roped him in. So he did--my dad actually was Buddhist but he was--he surprised my mother before their wedding day and converted to a Catholic in name. But so in terms of a full practicing Catholic, it wasn't until I was about eight or nine, and then he got--they both took us to church every Sunday and saw that we got our Catholic education, even though they had to struggle to support--even in those days--to support the tuition and the books and the supplies.

[00:04:26.29] SHANNON GREEN: You told of a little story in your autobiography about when you were born, you were born during the war [World War II].

[00:04:34.08] SISTER BRENDA LAU: I was born in the middle of the war. Mom was pregnant for me--she tells the story. And in those days everybody carried gas masks and there were air raid warnings when they expected something was pending at the time. And so she had just gone to the doctors, and got off the bus, she tells me, and the air raid signal went on. And what you needed to do was get to an air raid shelter. And she said the MP or military person directing this said, "Come on! Hurry up! Run!" So she had to run with her big tummy. And that brought on her labor pains, which took her to the hospital. But it took her about three and a half days before I was--could be born. And I wasn't quite ready because she said I turned just before she was ready to deliver, so they had to bring me out by instrument. And in those days they had these--I guess these metal instruments. I still have a dent in the back of my head that I know is there. But that was problem very tremendous for my mom. Of course I didn't know anything at the time.

[00:05:47.21] SHANNON GREEN: Did you hear other stories about that time--being in the war in Hawaii?

[00:05:53.17] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Only insofar as--my dad would talk very little about it--but he worked for the ammunition depot at Pearl Harbor. And the bombings occurred in that area. And I know there were a couple of accidents and bombings after, and they had to go back and clean up the--yeah. But if--this is a story I think about--if my dad and mom, in 1941, were married three weeks when the--let's see--when Pearl Harbor happened. And if my dad had not been home, I might not have had a dad and I might not have been here today, because he was right at the ammunition depot at the time. So--but because it was a Sunday, and he wasn't at the depot, he was spared. God spared him, and here I am today.

[00:06:50.07] SHANNON GREEN: So it was at St. Teresa's that you met the Sisters of St. Joseph?

[00:06:54.25] SISTER BRENDA LAU: It was at St. Teresa's. And I have a real funny story. I really loved school. I wanted to go to school so badly. So they enrolled me at St. Teresa's in the kindergarten, and I went from kindergarten to eighth grade--I had Sisters the whole time, in the full habit. And my mom tells me a kindergarten story. It was pouring rain. We had a class of sixty-eight kindergarteners in my class. And it was pouring rain, and I cried, and cried, because I couldn't go to school. I cried apparently so much that she walked me to school with water up to my knees, she says. But she got me to school, and there were twelve people--twelve kindergarteners in the classroom. But I really--apparently really loved school and I still--I love school periods. So that was an interesting story that I--she--I don't remember, but she told me about it. [laughs].

[00:07:48.05] SHANNON GREEN: Who were some of your teachers at St. Teresa's?

[00:07:50.15] SISTER BRENDA LAU: I had a number of Sisters who almost all have gone to God now. My--[Sister] Francis Celine [Leahy??] from the St. Louis province--don't remember her last name. But she was in the kindergarten. Sister Rose Marie [??] that was from LA province, is no longer with us. She was in the second grade. Sister Dorothy Ann [Elizabeth Ann Tobin?? (-2011)] was our third grade. Sister Victoria Joseph [Trembl??] was my fourth grade and eighth grade teacher. And that's an important year that I can come back to. Fifth grade was Sister Jeanne Miriam [Johnson??]. She--I believe was New York province. Sister Martha Mary [McGaw??] was in sixth grade, St. Louis province. And seventh grade was Sister Inez Denise [Hallinan??]. I think she was St. Louis or St. Paul, I wasn't sure. And then Sister Victoria Joseph again in the eighth grade. But in the fourth grade, that's when one day, just something hit me. Sister was up there teaching, and I says, "That's what I want to be when I grow up." And it just flashed in my mind, and it was not only being a teacher, it was more like being a Sister. It dawned on me that that's something--I don't know this until I reflect back on--. And an incident happened in the fifth grade, where it was at recess time and the wind was blowing, really blowing, and Sister's veil blew up and went around my neck. And I said--when I look back I thought maybe that was a sign. I said to my friends--my girlfriends--I'm going to be a Sister. [laughs]. So that was an interesting--I went--so all eight years to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet. And we had no high school in Hawaii with Sisters of St. Joseph, so I did--went to a Catholic high school and that was Sacred Hearts Academy, with the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. And they were at that time semi-cloistered. So the relationship with those Sisters was okay--they were mostly teachers--but there wasn't the same kind of warmth and relationship to--that I received when I went to St. Teresa's. So all my activities during my high school years were back at the parish of St. Teresa's. We had an organization called the Sodality, and many of our local Sisters who entered were part of that, and that's how we got to know the Sisters and even the parish priests. They kept supporting us, and doing things with us, and we were very grateful for that kind of support from them.

[00:10:31.03] SHANNON GREEN: Can you share with us a little bit about how the Sisters of St. Joseph ended up in Hawaii?

[00:10:36.11] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Oh, that is an interesting story. Way back when, Bishop Alencastre [Stephen Peter Alencastre, SSCC, born Estêvão Pedro de Alencastre (1876-1940)], who was the Bishop of Hawaii, discovered that the Sisters of Sacred Heart who were staffing St. Teresa's school--found out that the Sisters couldn't staff the school any more. So he sent out a letter to Mother General at that time in St. Louis and asked for Sisters. And initially the response was, "No, we don't have any Sisters to send." But he was persistent, I believe, and eventually the discussion went on at that level and Sisters from both St. Louis and California came to Hawaii to take over St. Teresa's school. And we'll be celebrating eighty years from the arrival of the Sisters next year. We celebrated seventy-nine this year and our big one will be eighty next year. And we've always been a unit of the congregation that have been staffed by Sisters from all the provinces. So after the St. Louis and the California Sisters came, we had a system then where they would rotate in and rotate out. So when one group came in another group came to replace them. And that happened for many years until maybe twenty-five years ago, when that changed--when there were no more Sisters to rotate back in. So currently we only have two Sisters from the Albany province who are still ministering in Hawaii.

[00:12:08.15] SHANNON GREEN: And when did local women start to enter the community?

[00:12:13.03] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Local women started with Sister James Therese Joseph, and I believe she entered in 1948. And I started kindergarten. [laughs]. And they entered the California province at that time. So everyone down until 19--I believe it was 1956--the Sisters who entered were--entered the California province. And from '56 on we became a--we were a mission. Hawaii

was a mission until that time. And our status changed in 1956 to a Vice-Province. And that's why the first Sister that entered was Sister Rosita Aranita, and she became the first Vice-Province Sister to enter the Hawaii Vice-Province. So even when I entered, and when the Superior at that time, Sister Regina Catherine [Brandt]--don't remember her last name--she said to us, "You know, you're going to go to California for your formation program, but you're entering for Hawaii", which meant we were coming back to Hawaii. So we understood that. And for me it was, I just wanted to be a Sister, so whatever is required, I'll do it. [laughs].

[00:13:35.26] SHANNON GREEN: So you mentioned you had those early moments in fourth grade and fifth grade where you could see yourself a Sister. And you described the Sacred Hearts and more semi-cloistered. Could you describe a little more of the personality or the culture of the Sisters of St. Joseph?

[00:13:53.00] SISTER BRENDA LAU: What struck me was they were personal--they're one to one. They cared for you--they showed how much they cared. They went to--came to all our meetings. They went to the skating rink with us. They may not have skated, I can't remember that. But they were there. They went on hikes with us. So there was the social interaction. And then--one of the other things that impressed me--we could see them in their chapel praying. And it was kind of a spiritual kind of thing that I was searching for at the time, that attracted me to the congregation. So it was a combination of the relationship, the happiness--they seemed really happy and joyful, and they showed it to us when they interrelated with us. So that was a big, big part of what nurtured what I felt was the call that I can look back now and know it was a call--didn't know what to call it at the time. Yes.

[00:14:48.26] SHANNON GREEN: And did that endure for you through high school?

[00:14:52.07] SISTER BRENDA LAU: You know what happened--for me it was, you know, you got--I got the first inkling in elementary school. Then you got, you know, you got to be a teenager and you got to interact with boys and--but it kept coming back--going and coming back. I even ended up with a boyfriend for two years in high school, you know, my last two years. But my--in senior year of my high school--this is really strange--all this time, you know, you got kind of a feeling the Sisters at St. Teresa's were kind of praying for you, and kind of encouraging you indirectly. There was never, ever pressure or a direct kind of thing. But we had a retreat senior year of high school, and we all had to go into the priest and say--one of the questions he said, "Have you ever thought of religious life?" And before this I had not said it to anybody. I mean, if you asked any of my classmates I was the least person they'd think would have gone into religious life. And I said, "Yes, I thought of entering." And actually saying it to myself and getting it out was what I needed to begin to do the process to act on it. Yes.

[00:15:58.19] SHANNON GREEN: How did your parents feel about it when you told them?

[00:16:01.13] SISTER BRENDA LAU: My mother was fine with it. She said, you know, what will make you happy. My dad had a very difficult time. I was the oldest Chinese child, that goes to work and supports the family when you come back, you know, after you get out of high--. I probably would not have been in college, if I had not. And that was another thing, backing up a little. When I was at Sacred Hearts we had two tracks after the freshman year. You would go along with a commercial track to prepare you for--secretarial kind of work, administrative, secretarial work--or an academic track to prepare you for college. And the Sisters at St. Teresa's, who were nurturing me encouraged me to go to the academic track. And so if I had not gone that route I would not have been able to enter and have the background I needed to be--enter and work with the Sisters here. So I'm sorry--you have to repeat that question again--I got off track.

[00:17:08.15] SHANNON GREEN: No that's okay. That's good. That sounds like--no that's helpful that they encouraged you and because of that you were more college-ready.

[00:17:14.25] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Ready, yes.

[00:17:16.25] SHANNON GREEN: So you were talking about your parents.

[00:17:17.27] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Okay. One more thing. So the priests invited us in and said, "Did you want--" and I said, "Yes." So that began--. Now my mom and dad--my dad had a very hard time. It was very difficult for him to--"You just want to go to California--you just want to get out of the home"--and that type of thing. And actually, it took him about five years to come around. My mother came up for my--when I got the habit--and he did not. But when I was ready to go out to teach here in California in '66, he did come up with her. And he and mom actually drove me to my mission. And ever since that he's been the proudest father of having a daughter that was a Sister. And it kind of disturbed him if I didn't introduce myself as "Sister". You know how time--with friends--"Oh, I'm Brenda, the daughter of so-and--". No. "She's Sister Brenda". So my mother still does that. And she doesn't stop and say--I'll introduce myself and say "Oh, I'm Brenda". And you know, "She's a nun, you know." [laughs]. So anyway that just shows how they did come around and--very supportive, and still are. My dad's gone. But my mom is going to be ninety-six in two weeks and she's still going.

[00:18:36.15] SHANNON GREEN: So when you officially enter, you come to Los Angeles as a postulant [unintelligible]?

[00:18:42.28] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Right. In those years we had to do our formation--we had nothing in Hawaii. So I entered in 1961--entered in September. The Brentwood--big Brentwood fire [Bel Air Fire] happened and I'm known as one of the "fire postulants". So we were here at--where the Retirement Center is--we call that our postulate and novitiate--and that third floor was burnt. So we sixty-one postulants were relocated to the Doheny campus. And we lived there in a couple of those houses there, piled up into rooms--[laughs]--because it was tight. And the bookstore that's there now was our postulate. And Doheny 8 [the Doheny Mansion] was our dining room area--in the Pompeian Room. And we did all our novi--they tried to be as normal as possible with all of our classes. We did our science and cut up cats around the pool at Doheny campus. [laughs]. So, those are some really fond memories that we have of our time. It was unique, because no one else had their experience there. So we were there from November to April--Easter time--as postulants. And then the renovations happened here [at Chalon campus] so we could move back into the postulate. And then we were the first group to be eleven-month postulancy. Actually, we were first for a lot. The prayers were changed from Latin to English, and throughout our formation period we kept losing parts of our habit. [laughs]. Each year there was something that was being, you know, put away. And so it was very interesting. Yeah.

[00:20:23.23] SHANNON GREEN: Yeah, because you enter right when Vatican II is happening--

[00:20:27.26] SISTER BRENDA LAU: --right as Vatican II is beginning--

[00:20:28.28] SHANNON GREEN: --and it sounds like they were implementing little things--

[00:20:30.15] SISTER BRENDA LAU: --little things at a time.

[00:20:32.19] SHANNON GREEN: How--what was that like? I mean, you entered with kind of one

expectation and then it starts to shift a little?

[00:20:38.01] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Well, you know I don't think I entered with an expectation, and I think that's what happened. I just wanted to be a Sister. And whatever it took I will do. So it was kind of--and I appreciate change. I really enjoy change. And if there wasn't going to be, fine, I'll work with that. But because there was, I moved with it. And each year it was kind of exciting to see what we were going to change--what else. Because I really entered at the time when we really--initially were pre-Vatican, you know--pre-Vatican regulation and prayers. And so little by little each of those were changed, and made a little more human, a little more--taking the human person into consideration as we--you know, we were human as well as religious, so--you work with both. Yeah.

[00:21:29.14] SHANNON GREEN: So you were--you just went with the changes in the habit and everything? That didn't--

[00:21:34.05] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Well, that took me--no, I had no problem with the change of the habit. I was in the habit for seven years--maybe eight--because I--no seven, because in '62 I got the habit--in '69 April--and I was out on mission at that time, meaning I was under final vows but I was out of the--I had finished my degree at Mount St. Mary's College, and we were assigned to missions. I was assigned to San Diego for two years at an elementary school. And my second year there--so I was there '66 to '68. In my second year there the message came out that we could change. But it was unique. I was with a Superior who said that we couldn't change until the pastor came back from his vacation. [laughs]. So it was really exciting. I was teaching second grade--I had about thirty-seven--it was my best teaching year. I just enjoyed that class--I'll never forget that class. And in fact I still have a memory of one of the students in there whose mother still keeps contact with me--from second grade. Anyway, that was unique, because she came to school in a little red wagon. She had been born where there was a disability--severe physical disability--so she was in a total body cast when she came to school. And but her father had built her a little desk thing to work on. She was bright--bright, bright--but physically she had difficulties. So--so much fun that year--and that teaching. So we changed in Apr--at Easter time. The pastor came back. We got two of the youngest people in the house changed--that was myself and Sister Francis Baker. And so I'm teaching reading to the little group, and all of sudden a little hand comes on my leg. And they're trying to feel out what's on that--you know, you had nylon stockings on--and he's rubbing--he or she, I can't remember--they were so fascinated with the Sister who was in this black habit for part of the year and--it was fun. [laughs]. It was delightful. But we moved into that. And I had one more year in Los Angeles--'68 to '69--before I went home to make my final commitment--I was accepted by the congregation perpetually--and I did it at the parish where I went to school, and where I had my first Communion and Confirmation which was St. Teresa's. So I did my final--perpetual vows there.

[00:24:06.04] SHANNON GREEN: If I can take you back to the Mount for just a minute--

[00:24:08.13] SISTER BRENDA LAU: --surely--

[00:24:09.13] SHANNON GREEN: What did you study, and who were some of the Sisters that you remember who taught you?

[00:24:14.11] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Okay. I was in--at that time when we were here at the Mount there was--they put us in what we called a "group major". So I had Biology, History and English. I loved Biology. I tolerated History and English. [laughs]. And some of the Sisters--I think I had a mixture. I don't remember all the lay teachers names. But I had Sister Margaret Marie O'Rourke for

one of the--and Sister [Mary] Gerald [Leahy (1917-2004)]. Of course, they were the Biology teachers. They were the science teachers that I had. And I had one teacher--I'm not sure who did it--I had Ecology, which I also loved. I think that was a Sister--I think that might have been Sister Margaret again too. So those were some of the--. I did have Spanish--it was a gentleman--I don't remember his name. We had the hardest time with the--was it Philosophy? The one Philosophy class. I mean we were out of this very thick book and you had to--anyway. I don't remember much about it. But I made it through. So we had a group major. So I did graduate in '66 with a group major. And then in order to get the teaching credential for California, we needed the fifth year. So it was in--see, I think I practice taught already before I left, while I was going through the college, because we had Education classes also. And--but I got my fifth year for the California credential after I went home--I came back and forth to get classes. So in '74 I solidified the teaching credential from K to 9. Meanwhile I was already teaching at home. And in '74 I was already Principal of a school in Hawaii. So at that point I went on to get my masters in Educational Administration from the University of Hawaii. So that's the highest degree I have. Yeah.

[00:26:15.03] SHANNON GREEN: You said--you mentioned one of your years in San Diego as one of your great teaching years. Did you enjoy being a teacher in general?

[00:26:22.28] SISTER BRENDA LAU: You know, I initially wanted to be a nurse--but--because we had no hospitals in Hawaii. But when I got into it I loved teaching. I did love it, yes. I did love teaching. So I did three years in California, and four years in Hawaii before--after that I was totally in administration at various levels in different ways.

[00:26:44.04] SHANNON GREEN: Did you experience any cultural adjustments or differences in terms of going back and forth from Hawaii to LA, and then--

[00:26:52.23] SISTER BRENDA LAU: You know, I didn't, but some of our Sisters did. I--for some reason--whatever education I had in--and one of the things--I spoke English a lot without much of an accent, much better than some of our Sisters did, because of the Sisters at St. Teresa's. They made it a point that we learn--and Hawaii was really at that point in history wanted everyone to learn proper English. In fact, Hawaii had "proper English" schools at the time. And so the education--so we could not use what we called "pidgin" when we were in the classroom, but boy did we do it when we were in the schoolyard! But I spoke pretty--learned it pretty well, and I was quite acclimated here for that. So I didn't experience what some of the other Sisters might have experienced. Yeah.

[00:27:47.06] SHANNON GREEN: Were you anxious to go back to Hawaii? Or did you--

[00:27:50.09] SISTER BRENDA LAU: I was. I really was. I had been here almost eight years, and I entered at a time when we didn't go--we didn't go back to Hawaii in any of those years. Because the Vatican changes applied to those that entered after us first. So I was a little too far ahead in the pecking line to have gone home earlier. So I was anxious to get home and just to be--the first thing that I stepped out of the plane--I got crit--I get teased, because I stepped out of the plane, and of course we had suits on and veils on and gloves--[laughs]--in Hawaii, gloves! But the first thing I noticed--the beautiful blue sky and the white clouds that I hadn't seen in a long time and I just felt--it was so much closer than here in California. So I was delightful to go back and get back with the peoples of Hawaii. Yes.

[00:28:48.02] SHANNON GREEN: Is there anything else about the changes in Vatican II that struck you? I mean, it wasn't just the habit, but, you know, the language of the liturgy changes, community styles start to change--what else do you remember that was--that--those changes

and how it impacted you?

[00:29:05.21] SISTER BRENDA LAU: I think the way we relate it to one another in community, and the relationship between Superiors and peers or Sisters--that began to be more relational and more human in a sense. Not that it wasn't human before, but a little easier to be able to discuss things and work things out together, rather than just be told--you do this, you do that. So I think that was one of the--for me, the biggest changes I saw. And we got away from this authority type of figure, but something that, because you were adults, you work out together. And I know--I don't know if it happened in California but I know at home--and we were just talking to someone who is--we were consulted then. "Would you be willing to take this job--position in this school, or this idea?"--not just said, "You are assigned." So that was a big--I think the biggest--change in terms of the way we operated with one another as a community.

[00:30:11.12] SHANNON GREEN: So you--you're back in Hawaii and you said you got your masters degree and then you were basically in educational administration for some time.

[00:30:22.25] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Yeah. I taught for--I mean, I was a Principal for six years, and at the end of six years we were going to open up a novitiate in Hawaii for the first time, and they needed a novice director. And guess who got tapped. [laughs]. So I went off to Rome, Italy for nine months to study in a program for religious who were either coming off leadership in their community or going into leadership or various types of things, and I was in what they call the apostolic religious community's program. And it was a program where only one person from each congregation was selected to be in the program, except for the--one order, School Sisters of Notre Dame that had two because one of the Directors was part of the program, so they allowed a second person to go in. So we were from thirty-six different congregations--thirty-six different religious orders. There were six from the African countries, and we had Scotland and Ireland and the Philippines and Korea--so we were quite a wonderful mixture of Sisters in that program. And we were in the generalate of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur for our classes, and our instructors came to us, so you needed to speak English, because everything was in English. But we had excursions into Rome itself, and into the Vatican, and that type of thing in the process, so it was a wonderful background in spirituality and religious life, psychology--so it was a well-rounded program that gave me a basis for begin a novitiate program from scratch. I had one novice, and she's still with us, so--[laughs]. And I totally worked with her the first year--this is 1980. The second year she had classes at the university as well as classes in the novitiate, so then I started part time in the Catholic school department and that title eventually became the Associate Superintendent for the State of Hawaii's Catholic Schools. And I was in that position for eight years, until I got elected to the--what at that time was the generalate--I got elected as a General councilor at a fairly early age. [laughs].

[00:32:47.02] SHANNON GREEN: [laughs]. So--as--I'm going to pause a second here--so as Novice Director, you were doing two--you were Novice Director and you were working in the Superintendent of--

[00:32:55.10] SISTER BRENDA LAU: --well, the second year, yes. The first year it was Novice Director classes. We participated in the Federation programs, so we came to the St. Louis, to the California for the novice to get to be related to the congregation in [unintelligible]. I don't think we went to St. Paul or to Albany, but St. Louis in particular because those were our roots, so we had the experience for a novice there. And she met the novices from the other provinces, so that was good.

[00:33:25.12] SHANNON GREEN: Could you share--I can imagine--but can you share the



differences between when you were a novice and what you were doing as novice mistress.

[00:33:34.12] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Oh, right. Okay. So the program, number one, was a one-to-one program, with the Novice Director. We participated in inter-provincial experiences, which we didn't as novices here. And it was a lot more relational. She wasn't told, "you do this", "you do that", she was exposed to the spirit--spirituality, history and the values of the charism in our congregation. And also we were able to tap into the gifts that she had--that she could share. So there's a mutuality there, which she did. She participated in community life, related to the other Sisters, which we didn't do--we kind of were separated. So quite a difference. [laughs]. Yes. And I had her work at knowing it was going to be a difference, because it's a different way of walking with the novice.

[00:34:27.18] SHANNON GREEN: That's great. And then you were elected to leadership. Is there anything you want to share about your time as the Associate Superintendent?

[00:34:34.26] SISTER BRENDA LAU: I had wonderful experience in there. I assisted the Superintendent, but I also did a program with fourteen schools--no, I did it with seven schools--with helping them do long-range planning. I kind of had designed a program based from a parish kind of program for long range planning, and I would go to all of these school boards and help them work through the steps they needed to do to do planning for their school. So that consumed a lot of time. I also helped get the basis started for the scholarship program called the Augustin Foundation, so we could provide scholarships to students that were wanting to come to a Catholic school and they could apply. So I got the computer base set up for that. Didn't know anything about computers, but learned, and got help when I needed help. And that was two of the major projects there--Augustin Foundation then and the long-range planning. Those were three major things that I did over the years. And of course we were one-to-one with Principals when they needed help.

[00:35:42.02] SHANNON GREEN: So it sounds like you are really coming into a ministry of leadership in general?

[00:35:45.04] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Yes.

[00:35:46.17] SHANNON GREEN: Did--was that a surprise to you, or was that--?

[00:35:50.04] SISTER BRENDA LAU: I was really surprised when--I mean, in terms of the--being elected to the governance structure at the top--you know, you--you know what I think? I'm somebody from a different culture, and I think in a period in the time in the history of the congregation we were dealing with diversity--beginning to deal with diversity--and differences, and I think that had the influence of why the Sisters chose to select me as part of the team. We were also at a transition there. The General Superior was elected with an Assistant, and there were three councilors. And that was a first time--we were going to live all together--so I had to move to St. Louis--and work together and not with the Superior and the Assistant doing everything. So that was the first experience before the true team--the next four years--got put in place. So that was a wonderful experience. We worked well. The five of us worked really well together. At least that's my experience. [laughs].

[00:36:57.21] SHANNON GREEN: Who were some of the people you served with?

[00:36:59.02] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Sister Ida Robertine [Berresheim, birth name Elizabeth Eugena Berresheim] was the General Superior. Sister "Kathy" [Katherine "Kitty"] Hanley--Kitty Hanley.

[Sister] Barbara Sullivan (1936-) from California, and myself and [Sister] Rose McLarney from St. Louis--we were the five that worked together.

[00:37:19.28] SHANNON GREEN: Did you feel you were able to bring a kind of different cultural expression--experience?

[00:37:26.03] SISTER BRENDA LAU: I think physically I brought a different reality. And there was a little bit of the culture thing there, but not a whole lot. Yeah. Because I was surrounded mostly by the Caucasian group in the congregation at the time.

[00:37:47.05] SHANNON GREEN: How did you adjust to life in St. Louis?

[00:37:49.22] SISTER BRENDA LAU: I loved it. I really loved it. I lived with--I chose not to live in an institution. I lived in a community of the St. Louis Sisters, and a couple of them who I met had invited me, so--. But I actually moved three times. I actually moved four times in four years. [laughs]. I started in the community that had Sisters who were there from Peru who were on sabbatical for a year--somebody starting at the University, a Sister from another order, and a Sister from St. Louis. That community in one year disbanded, because people were going different places. So one of the Sisters who I lived with who was Sister Patty Johnson--and that's going to be a history--she and I and [Sister] Audrey Olson from St. Louis moved into an apartment that we rented. So we were there for a year with great experiences, especially in the snow. [laughs]. I mean not knowing how to operate in snow. And then the following year, the community house in that same parish was going to be emptying out, so we moved there. And then that started the relationship with Sister Patty Johnson, because she came to Hawaii several years later and she and I lived together for twelve years in the housing project where we ministered full time outside, and came in and worked with the residents and the children in the project.

[00:39:08.13] SHANNON GREEN: Oh, we'll have to talk about that.

[00:39:09.27] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Yeah. Crazy experiences--I can't believe the experiences that I've had.

[00:39:15.06] SHANNON GREEN: Just for the sake of history, could you say a little bit more about who Sister Patty Johnson is.

[00:39:18.18] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Sister Patty Johnson is a Sister of the St. Louis province, and she currently is the Executive Director for the Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph. And she's now the head of that--Executive Director for that organization. Yes.

[00:39:35.16] SHANNON GREEN: So you loved being in St. Louis? That's great.

[00:39:37.09] SISTER BRENDA LAU: I did. I did. It was a different atmos--cultural experience in a sense, but more the climate--it was a different climate. I went through the snow and rain, you know, and a lot of --. Funny story--the first week I was there it was January--no--yeah, it was January. And it had been snowing and ice. So I get out to the--to drive to the congregational--generalate, and I have a car, I know how to get there. So--but I have to clean off the windows in the car. So I scraped them all off, I get in the car, then I turn on the windshield wipers. [laughs]. And the water thing and they all freeze up again. [laughs]. And I get teased about it all the time. That's how much I knew about snow and ice in those days. Yes.

[00:40:27.15] SHANNON GREEN: It's an adjustment.

[00:40:28.23] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Yes.

[00:40:30.00] SHANNON GREEN: [laughs]. I want to reflect for a moment on--just on you as a leader, women leaders, the CSJ kind of style of leadership, because at the Mount we talk a lot about leadership for our women students. So I'm just wondering if there are ways in which you learned to be a leader, ways in which Sisters encourage each other in leadership, what's important for women's leadership?

[00:40:54.12] SISTER BRENDA LAU: You know, I think probably when I go back--when we started the changes, when we could voice our own initiative--and I think the leadership comes from inside out--that you have the best of others in mind when you wish to share with others and urge others to--. So I tend to be an extrovert, and I--especially more in the early days--I was fearless about trying things. And I did different kinds of things. One of the things that--I think it was just before I was asked to be Principal at Holy Trinity--I had the science program for the seventh and eighth grade. And we needed a science table so bad. They were closing the seminary, and they had a teaching department, so I managed to finagle--and I don't know how I did it--to get the tables that they had there--the science tables--to put them into a classroom with forty-five children, and had the whole thing--. They had to take it over the ceiling of the railing of the second floor of the school to get them into the classrooms, and then we the Bunsen burners and all that kind of things to work with. But I think, going back to that first question, it's the initiative one takes to work with others and try to keep discovering ways to do things better. And paying attention to how things are done and how other people are doing things, and, you know, following in the footsteps of others, and then modifying it as you go along based on your own personality and talents and gifts. Yes.

[00:42:37.21] SHANNON GREEN: Is--do you think there's something in particular about the CSJ tradition, charism or heritage that brings out this kind of--

[00:42:45.29] SISTER BRENDA LAU: I do. I mean, if you look back to the bravery of our first Sisters--when you think the things that they did, and how they started--and even how they got on that boat to come over to America, and only knowing French, not knowing how to do this or do that--I think the spirit of adventure--being adventuresome--is innate in a number of the Sisters as we go along--trying different things and working through the difficulties. Look at the Civil War that they just closed everything up and worked with the Army--the soldiers. And we did the same thing in Hawaii. When--in World War II, St. Teresa's became a haven for the soldiers there, and the Sisters, you know, nurtured them and they reciprocated in many ways to help--with rations for the Sisters, so. And they--you know--the support that they got. Yeah. I think so. [laughs].

[00:43:47.11] SHANNON GREEN: It sounds very inspiring. It sounds like it inspires you.

[00:43:49.18] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Yes. Definitely. Of what has gone before us--and not only before us, as you watch the leaders as we moved up in religious life--that same spirit comes through--the caring for others, the reaching out, the "dear neighbor" that we talk about, and how we do that--not only for the dear neighbor but for each other. Yes.

[00:44:14.01] SHANNON GREEN: Are there other Sisters that have been models for you specifically in your leadership?

[00:44:18.24] SISTER BRENDA LAU: I think all along the line. Sisters who have been in leadership, you know--have shown us different ways that it can be done. And there have been different styles

over the years. And I only know the ones that I related to in Hawaii because I was there the most time--[Sister] Regina Catherine [Brandt] was from St. Louis and what a model for us. She had a gentleness about her, and as well as a way of enabling another person. And then--let's see--when I went back I served on the Councils the whole time and worked with different Vice Provincials over the years. So then you got the experience of the kinds of things you need to deal with--did work with. And so that was a great opportunity for learning from others for the Sisters. Yes.

[00:45:11.21] SHANNON GREEN: That's great. So after you--your period as a councilor, you go back to Hawaii--

[00:45:19.17] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Okay. I went back to Hawaii in '94--

[00:45:22.20] SHANNON GREEN: --and it seems like you start to get really involved with more direct ministry [unintelligible]--

[00:45:26.06] SISTER BRENDA LAU: I did. I was--they needed somebody to help with the Interfaith Committee Against Domestic Violence. And then I also--and that wasn't a full-time position--so there was a parish position that they needed an administrator. So that one year I did the Interfaith--Executive Director for the Interfaith Network Against Domestic Violence. And essentially it was organizing the interfaith groups to do marches, to do workshops to educate against domestic violence, to work with--partner with other organizations that were doing work with the women. And then in the parish was helping to assist in running the parish. I did that for three years. Then I got elected to Vice Provincial leadership. [laughs]. And that was a three-year term, renewable once, so I was in it for six years. And that took me to 2003. And in 2003, I looked for a position--in 2003--you'll have to refresh my memory--

[00:46:39.20] SHANNON GREEN: It says you were in a domestic abuse shelter.

[00:46:41.11] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Okay. So then Child and Family--I was looking for a position and Child and Family Services--[Sister] Patty Johnson was working there. [laughs]. And she made me aware that there was a need in a domestic abuse shelter. So I applied and got hired by Child and Family Services, which is a private, non-profit in Hawaii. And there are all kinds of programs for women and children. And so this one was for the domestic abuse shelter. So I actually went into the shelter--it was a secret shelter--I was a counselor there, and I worked one-to-one every day with the women coming in. And then once a week I did classes on domestic abuse with children. I took the women to court to get "TRO's" [temporary restraining orders?] and worked with the court system, and went to family court with them also if they needed to go there. And then when they were ready to transition--we had a transition house--I would take them to transition house and get all that set up there. And in the middle of that, about two years, I get a call from the pastor in one of the parishes. He was running two parishes and I knew him for a long time. He went to school with our Sisters and everything. And he said, "I really need an administrator here to help." [laughs]. So I thought about it, and I loved that domestic violence work, but this was another call. So I did go to another parish for three years until he was changed, and another pastor came in. So I was in there--that's another story.[laughs].

[00:48:17.06] SHANNON GREEN: Let's go back for a second. How did you--was it [Sister] Patty Johnson that got you interested--

[00:48:22.06] SISTER BRENDA LAU: [Sister Patty] started--got me interested in the--that there was a position with the Child and Family Services.

[00:48:26.23] SHANNON GREEN: So that was--would that have been a new ministry for you?

[00:48:29.12] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Yes, very new, because I had come out of leadership. I had done a little bit when I first came back from congregational leadership as the Executive Director, but it wasn't as hands-on. This one was really hands-on.

[00:48:45.00] SHANNON GREEN: Had this been a passion for you? Or how did you kind of come to know these issues about [unintelligible]?

[00:48:51.07] SISTER BRENDA LAU: I don't know if it was a passion, but it was a way of reaching out that was exciting. It was another change--another challenge. And I like challenge. [laughs]. So it was like, "Hey, let's do it! Let's see what I can--what gifts I can bring to the situation." And I was able to give, and I wasn't, you know, bad at it. So it was more that way than say, initially I wanted to do this. It was there, so I responded to the need. Yes. You know, like "divide the cities, see the needs, respond to your need". Yeah.

[00:49:23.16] SHANNON GREEN: What needs did you learn about?

[00:49:25.17] SISTER BRENDA LAU: I learned about that the women needed people to talk to them. They needed to be assured that there was somebody that would listen--that there was somebody there who would help them walk through this period of time. Yeah. Essentially. Yeah. And that's what you did, you know, you did as much as to enable rather than to do for them. Because they're scared of this stuff, and in the beginning you help them do a little, but eventually you get them to be independent, to make good choices for themselves. Yes.

[00:49:53.28] SHANNON GREEN: Sounds very gratifying.

[00:49:55.02] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Yeah. It does. It is.

[00:49:56.20] SHANNON GREEN: So you were open though to going back to parish life--

[00:50:00.18] SISTER BRENDA LAU: I was open--I loved working with the people in parish. You essentially do a lot of coordination, and look to see that this group had all the [unintelligible]. So it's a lot of-- coordinating the volunteers. I helped the pastor organize the parish council, got that going. And that's essentially it. And we--oh, it also meant you bought all the candles to supply for the church, and you saw that all the books were ready--you know, it was jack-of-all-trades for that, or jacqueline-for-all-trades for that. Yeah. So you did many different things and--I still have people that I meet now, "When are you coming back to St. Philomena's?", you know. I say, "Well, I'm on a different route now, right now." Yes.

[00:50:44.12] SHANNON GREEN: You know, I'm very interested in parish life myself, so I'm always curious just to hear what some of the joys of being in a parish were or are for you. But I've also heard a lot about liturgy in Hawaii as being very special. I don't know if there's anything you would like to share about that?

[00:51:03.14] SISTER BRENDA LAU: I think there's many opportunities for us to bring in the local culture into liturgies, particularly around the holiday times. Like at Thanksgiving time, we have people dressing up in their different native costumes, bringing what we call the "ho'okupu", which is the offering. "Ho'okupu" is in Hawaiian--the offerings. At different times when we could intersperse the cultural reality--and some parishes had more mixtures than others. The last parish I was in was heavily Filipino, but we had some Samoan parishioners also, and then--the mix, the

local mix--so it was quite a mixture. The pastor was--he was Japanese-Portuguese himself--he was a mixture--at least the one I worked with. Yeah. So the cultures really worked together well. Lot of cultural food. Eating was a big thing. During Christmas time they have this Novena called "Misa de Gallo"--and it's the "Mass of the Roosters". So you get up and go at five o'clock Mass. Then you had a big feast after--everybody brought--it wasn't just pastry and coffee. It was rice and soup and what have you. Every ethnic group that was there--and it was a good social time to intermingle and get to meet each other. Yeah. And that's what you have in a parish which you didn't have in the work you did--say I did with domestic violence. That's a little bit different. Yeah.

[00:52:40.13] SHANNON GREEN: But you said then you had to leave the parish?

[00:52:44.16] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Yeah. That was a little hard. Now you know, when you talk about experiences in one [unintelligible]--there was a change in pastor. And Hawaii has had to bring in a lot of foreign pastors into the group, and not always knowing the system in Hawaii. And so the day this new pastor came in--although he had been in the islands in another parish a little while--he just cut my position--called me in and said, "Your position is being cut." No conversation, no nothing. And at that time it was such a shock to me I didn't even know how to respond to that. So I actually said, "Okay. I'm not needed here." And then there was some experiences after that. I terminated in say, July--I took my vacation and retreat time. Then I was going on to retreat. And I started two days at the retreat. And for some reason I had to go out and use the phone--which I wasn't having service. And there was a traumatic incident there. I got--I was parked on the side of the road. A woman coming in the other direction fell asleep at the wheel. Her car turned in and hit me head on. So I ended up in emergency. I wasn't hurt really bad, but kind of shaken up, and so my retreat didn't finish. I--we took care of everything--and then I went back to our center house to recuperate for the week. And at the end of that week Sister Patty, who was at the center house at the time, she said, "Oh, there's a Senior Fair going on. You can go down there and get your flu shot." So we went down, we got our flu shot, and then we walked around and she says, "Oh, let's stop to this person". She was in the--what we call the SHIP program, the State Health Insurance Program--we also called it SAGE-plus at the time. It's a federal program that helps Medicare beneficiaries navigate the Medicare system. And she said, "Pamela, do you still have a position open?" And Pamela is, "Yeah. I'm still looking for somebody." And Patty says to me, "Why don't you apply?" Now I'm sixty-five years old at this point. And it's very unusual. So--but they don't ask you your age [unintelligible]. So I actually said I was looking for a position, because I had finished the other one, and I felt that we needed to--I was still capable of bringing in some compensation for the community. And I'd been out of it so much because of administration so--religious administration. So I went and applied, interviewed, and I received--I got the job. So I started in the Department of Health, State of Hawaii, Executive Office of Aging, in the SHIP program. So we were federally funded, but we were employed by the State, so the money came that right. And I did that for six years. And at the end of six years I began to have some health problems that needed to be taken care of, but I was also eligible for retirement. So I did all the health thing I could do before I went out of the state-covered insurance, and in 2014 I retired. And then they needed a Treasurer for the Vice-Province. [laughs]. And I had done some of that before, so--for a year I did the treasury--took Treasurer position. And then I got elected again to--[laughs]--the team that we just had and our main job was to effect the amalgamation of Hawaii and Los Angeles. And we spent two and a half years really working at that. And it happened in July of this year. We're now part of the Los Angeles province. And for--what I didn't tell you was--remember some of the Sisters entered the Los Angeles province? Well, in my first term as Vice-Provincial we worked at planning for retirement. So at that time we said, "Okay, we need to know who we're planning for." So we said to the local Sisters who were belonging to the California province, "We're planning for retirement--if you think you want to retire in Hawaii, we need to talk about that." And at that time our system was, you needed to change provinces. So the majority of

the local Sisters that came back to Hawaii changed provinces. And that's when we also got Sister Sara Sanders, who had been ministering there a long time--she came over, and one Sister from the Albany province, Sister Angela Lorenzo. They had been ministering there a long time and said, "No, our heart is here--we're going to--". So we had many of the Sisters come back to the--so--as part of the Vice-Province. And so then, all of us now are back in the Los Angeles province. [laughs]. We still have two Sisters from Albany province serving in Hawaii but they now belong to their province. Yes, so--interesting, huh?

[00:57:36.24] SHANNON GREEN: You've had a diversity of ministry--

[00:57:37.08] SISTER BRENDA LAU: I have such diversity--yes. So now, having finished a two year term in leadership--and now we're part of the Los Angeles province. But we're kind of doing some things on our own in Hawaii. So I've been named the Hawaii Coordinator. So I'm still trying to effect the [makes air quotes] "nitty gritty" of the transition. A lot of it has to do about the corporation, the moneys meld--the merging of the moneys, and helping the Sisters understand the LA system. So that's coming along. But we just had a meeting of our committee. We had a committee that initially worked on it then, and we're coming along really well. Yes.

[00:58:18.02] SHANNON GREEN: I wanted to ask you a little bit more about--you said you and Sister Patty lived in a housing--

[00:58:22.29] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Yes. That was a--

[00:58:24.13] SHANNON GREEN: Could you share a little bit about that?

[00:58:25.08] SISTER BRENDA LAU: What happened was in 1986 the Maryknoll Sisters had been serving in the Kalihi Valley Homes, which is a state housing complex. And it was one of the biggest state housing complex. And in '86 there was a living--the Maryknoll Sisters were living in it, helping the people with any kind of social needs they had in the parish--in the parish--in the housing project. And they couldn't staff any more. So Sister Joan Henehan was the Provincial at the time. And she put out a plea to the Sisters of us, anybody who'd be willing to go live there and help with the tenant Association and the children. And at that time, three of--two people responded and they were trying to get a third one, trying to get a third--I hadn't thought about it before. And I thought, "Hey, I'm free, I can do it." Again, a challenge. [laughs]. So I applied and I got accepted. So the first year, Sister Francine Costello, who was on sabbatical for a year from Peru, myself and Sister Rose Anthony Tanio--we started in the housing initially with the Tenant Association. I was working full time in a school department at the time, so I helped in between, on weekends, on Sundays, special occasions. And Rose was--Sister Rose Anthony was half-time--she was working in the parish and half-time. So we worked with the tenants, we helped them navigate the systems when they had a--we got a little business started with--what do you--ceramics. And the housing management was good too--they helped and worked with us. So we did that. We were there twenty years. And over the time, Sister Francine went back to Peru; Sister Rose Damien [Malabon] who's now since passed, she came in--so we had the two Roses there. I was between the two Roses. So the two Roses were there for quite a while. And then Sister Rose Anthony got sick, so she needed to move on. But during that time I think, Sister Rose Damien decided she wanted to go back to Maui where she's from to teach there. So she went back. And I went to St. Louis for four years. So Sister Rose Anthony was there by herself with a couple of Sisters from different orders for a little while until I came back. And then Sister Rose Anthony got sick and that's when Sister Patty Johnson came in. And it ended up both Sister Patty Johnson and I were there until 2010. And we pretty much by that time--Patty and I--we had a children's library on our bottom floor. The bedrooms were upstairs and we turned our whole living room into a library. The

kids would come in, take a book, read with us--and we would take--on Halloween time the whole house was a haunted house with the kids. And we did a lot of things with the kids. And this time the Tenant Association was organized by someone else, so we pretty much worked with the kids. We opened it up to the rest of our Sisters, so Sisters would come in for the reading program and meet with the kids. So we did that for twelve years until 2010. So this is January--February of 2010, and I get a call at my office. I'm working for the State now. And, "You need to come home. There's been a--there's something that's happened here. There's two huge boulders that came down the mountain and it crashed into the building that you're in." Little did we know until I got there that it crashed into our apartment in particular. The boulder's as big as a BMW car--two huge boulders. So it smashed into the apartment, broke our pipes, flooded the lower floor, destroyed our washer and dryer which you had to keep outside. So they moved us to--we were in a semi-renovated apartment--they moved us into one of the older apartments temporarily. In the meantime, the Housing Authority had a change in leadership. And Sister Patty Johnson had mobilized to help all the other tenants in the other rooms to get help, contacted the local church down the street and brought food in and got them--[sighs]. It seemed like--I don't know for sure, because I wasn't involved in that--that our HA didn't like Patty doing that. So we got an informal verbal notice they wanted us out by ninety days. They didn't want the [makes air quotes] "service providers" living in any more. So we waited about five months before we decided, okay, the writing's on the wall, local management didn't want us to move but their hands were tied. So we decided, okay, rather than--you know, that would make the apartment ready for another family that might have to come in. So we moved. Patty and I moved to one of our province houses in Kailua--so then we were five there. And then slowly but surely Patty went back to accept a job, the other New York Sister went back to New York, Sister Rose Marie [??] came back to Los Angeles, so there are just two of us in that house. And when Sister Marian finishes here, she will come back--so there'll be three in that house. But that's what we did in Kalihi Valley Homes was that. And we worked with the police in the area and everything. It was really a real social coordinated thing there.

[01:04:04.01] SHANNON GREEN: Yeah. It just sounds like your ministry has been all of these--

[01:04:08.04] SISTER BRENDA LAU: --I know--[laughs].

[01:04:08.19] SHANNON GREEN: --social institutions and structures--some secular, some church--

[01:04:14.00] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Yes. And little did I know that's where I was going to be moving towards, because I thought--I think the basics was I was open to whatever challenge there was there, and I'd do my best. Yes.

[01:04:24.27] SHANNON GREEN: Would you share a little bit with us about your spiritual life--your spiritual practices and how those--you wrote about that in your--

[01:04:34.06] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Yes. I have been involved a lot with the novitiate and the different kinds of prayer practices, such as Centering Prayer--different kinds of liturgies that we were involved in. I belonged to a women's group for a while where actually our focus was domestic violence and trying to educate the parishes, but we also did things together. We had weekend spirituality sharings, of course the regular retreats that we had--sometimes it was in a small group--other times it was joining other religious orders with it, so that you had an experience of the different kinds of things. We did sharing with houses--we'd read something and then we'd come and talk about it. And of course the personal prayer in the house--we had to struggle with that to find a time that would work with the schedules, but we managed to do that--we keep that



as key among us. Yeah.

[01:05:31.28] SHANNON GREEN: You mentioned something about learning some more Eastern practices?

[01:05:36.24] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Yeah. I--at one point I got involved with Zen. So we learned that the Zen type of prayer. And it was a group of us that did that. We went to a monastery to experience it there in Hawaii. And I mostly equate it to is the Centering Prayer--very similar--it's just a different way they come at it. Yeah. So I've done that. Yes. [laughs]. And--let me think--we did prayer workshops too. Yeah--helping others learn that. And we have the Associate group in Hawaii known as the Ohana, and we bring a lot of that--every meeting together begins with a spiritual kind of experience, with all of us together.

[01:06:20.26] SHANNON GREEN: Could you just say a little bit about the Ohana?

[01:06:23.02] SISTER BRENDA LAU: The Ohana is women and men in the area mostly, but Eastern part of the island, because the Sisters were concentrated there--they went to a parish there. So--but slowly back in the eighties it got started. It kind of--we started out with our parents and--yeah our parents being part of what we call The Carondelet Guild. That was a guild system. And when the congregation moved to an Associate program, the Guild kind of faded out and this Ohana with the specific training, in our spirit and spirituality, our history and our charism--was part of their training program like it is today--got started. So we had a number come in. They do mirror us, though, in terms of age. We just have a couple that are younger. But they want the connection and the spirituality of sharing with the Sisters. So we still continue that. They come once a month. There's a spirituality--and we even have gotten them now to take some leadership in sharing. Like, I was at the last meeting and one of the Ohana members shared--she had gone to a workshop on sleep, and she wanted to share that with the group after our--you know, our prayer. And we have what we call "potluck"--you understand that? I don't know what you call it here--we call it "potluck". And you share a meal together. And then they're doing projects together. We participate in the Family Promise, helping families that have no homes, and they're trying to get money enough together to begin a home or an apartment. So we take--they come and stay at one of our parishes for a week. And we bring food, help feed and talk with them once a week, and like that type of thing. So Family Promise, and then they're doing little projects at different times. We're doing another one for doing baskets for needy families that need--we're doing that with the diocese. So different projects like that--very engaged with the Associate members. And they decided--because they really don't know Los Angeles very well, or the people, and they have no--because of the distance--no way of connecting. So they decided to stay a group unto themselves just relating to the Sisters in Hawaii. So that's where our Associates are at at this point.

[01:08:54.17] SHANNON GREEN: And what does "Ohana" mean?

[01:08:56.04] SISTER BRENDA LAU: "Ohana" means "family". It's larger--you don't have to just be blood. But it's those that connect with each other--in a regular sort of way. So we have an Ohana group on Oahu, because we're islands, and one on Maui--because we have Sisters on both islands. And the Maui Ohana gathers in one of the houses on Maui, and then the Oahu Ohana gathers in the center house that we have on Oahu. Yeah. And once--but what they're trying to do now is periodically Zoom [video conference] with each other, so they can see each other and share. So they're working on that right now. Yeah.

[01:09:38.16] SHANNON GREEN: You seem to still have so much joy and zeal and energy. What is

giving you life these days?

[01:09:45.19] SISTER BRENDA LAU: I guess the new transition, you know--moving into a bigger unit--finding out how we can move in there and how we can mutually work things out together and keep that moving together--and being able to meet a larger number of Sisters who--. Like, for example, I left here in '69. I knew everybody possibly--not everybody--I knew the people by the other religious names, so I'm trying to learn. And the more we come for assemblies and meetings and that--it's an inspiration because we're not just stuck out there by ourselves doing our thing, but we're part of a larger endeavor as the Sisters of St. Joseph. And even--you know, because I was in leadership, I had the experience across the congregation, because I've been in every province of the congregation and I tell people it's just like being in the military because I've been so many different places--just because of being in leadership, which is a gift--a gift that I'm grateful for.

[01:10:52.01] SHANNON GREEN: That actually reminds me--because we did some filming at Assembly--would you just say a little bit about why you were in town and what Assembly is generally for us?

[01:11:02.06] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Okay. Assembly for us is a bigger gathering of what we used to have in Hawaii twice a year. We called ours "forums". And it was an opportunity for all of the Sisters to come together--for us to hear each other, share with each other, understand different things we were doing and offer suggestions of where we want to move as a group. The Assembly here in Los Angeles is similar, except they only gather once a year, because you're talking about two hundred as opposed to forty-five gathering together--but again, looking at our life together, how we want to continue to mission together, hand-in-hand, and supporting those who are still actively able to do mission, and to support the Sisters who are in ministry with us in prayer, in the process. So in the last--this is the first year that anyone in the Hawaii unit could come over if they wanted to the Assembly. This is my third year, because as we were doing this transition, just the leadership came over to experience what it was. And then in the second year actually anybody who wanted to come could come, but it wasn't as many. And this time more people came to experience meeting the Sisters who we haven't seen for years and years, sharing the common desires and focuses that we have with one another, and even dealing with the challenges. [laughs]. So, yes.

[01:12:40.05] SHANNON GREEN: Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you wanted to share?

[01:12:45.09] SISTER BRENDA LAU: No I think we covered a lot of the major kind of things that have run through my life as a Sister, which I appreciate.

[01:12:54.26] [Director's comments].

[01:15:12.18] SHANNON GREEN: Please share with us the experience of the dance from the liturgy over the weekend.

[01:15:17.24] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Oh I'd be happy to do that. The dance originated--it was really the end of something we began three--two years ago in particular, when we were working for the amalgamation. One of our team members, Sister Sara Sanders, put together these ribbons in which the name of every Sisters in the Los Angeles province and every Sister in the Hawaii province were printed on the ribbons. And in Hawaii, one of the customs is to always do lei draping with visitors--and a way of expressing our cultural welcome to people. So we decided at that point--we were looking for a symbol that would kind of communicate the amalgamation process. We said, "Okay,

why don't we start with the weaving of these ribbons together and continue it each time until the amalgamation was completed." With the weaving of the ribbon when we first introduced it, we brought to the ceremony a song that was done by Haas [David Robert Haas (1957-), American Catholic composer]--I can't remember his first name, but--

[01:16:32.15] SHANNON GREEN: David.

[01:16:33.13] SISTER BRENDA LAU: David Haas. And it's the Hawaiian song that he wrote for the--we would have--in fact, it's coming up in November--a liturgical conference every year, and at one of the conferences he wrote this. When it would talk about "weaving together"--we weaving--weaving one heart--weaving our hearts together. So essentially the song is "Weave One Heart". And with Hawaiian dance, which I started learning since I was about seven or eight years old, it fits right into demonstrating what it means to weave one heart. So many of the motions have to do with following the words of the song and trying to communicate--as you do to people who are deaf--but in music and dance, the story that you are trying to tell, or the idea that you are trying to communicate to the group. So what happened is, we had a special ceremony in Hawaii on September 8, in which we did something remembering the past and looking to the future, and again doing weaving a little bit more of the ribbon together--because we had Los Angeles there--leadership there, Mary Snyder [??] was there--and we did it there. And we said, let's take a piece of that and bring it to Los Angeles and do it--a version of it--to signify the coming together of both units. So Sister Teresa Cavalli, Sister Marilyn [??], Sister [Keerin??], Sister Francine [Costello??] and I looked at--and [Mary??]--looked at what we could do to symbolize it. So we decided that Sister Marilyn, Sister [Keerin??] and Francine, who were part of the transition committee from each side, and then Mary who did the dance in Hawaii--and Sister Eva Joseph [Mesina??] should have been here to do that, but she wasn't able to come, so they asked me if I would do that. So the idea was to share with our Sisters that this has come together--the weaving has come together--and the song explains how we can come together and share one heart. And so exactly the dance, so to speak, was trying to interpret the whole coming together of the two units. And we--Mary and I worked out that when we finished the song we would join hands, and that the lay would come forward, and the lay would be joined, and then put on the altar as symbolic with our union with one another. Yes. As completed.

[01:19:12.04] [Director's comments].

[01:20:22.07] SHANNON GREEN: Could you describe the Second Vatican Council for us?

[01:20:26.25] [Director's comments].

[01:20:40.01] SISTER BRENDA LAU: The Second Vatican Council was an opportunity for the whole Church to take a serious look at the way the Church was structurally ritualizing its faith--I believe, that's my interpretation--and it's promulgation of the Gospel message to people. So it was an invitation to go back and look at roots. And in relationship to the Sisters it was, go back to look at the roots of how religious orders were formulated, and how yours were formulated within that early structure. Because early structure says we were hermits and we were in cloisters. And at the time, the needs of the times required more of the service--the gifts that these women had to offer. So our Founders--when we went back to look at our roots--said, okay, we don't want you shut away. There's a place for that, for the Sisters to pray--but also we need women that will go out into the villages and the countries and bring the Gospel message, and help the needy that need help. And so we went back to our roots and looked at how and--we were formed. And initially, we had all of these women on the streets of Le Puy [France], who were selling lace or making lace and trying to--and also we had women who were using other means to support themselves. And they

needed support and they needed help. So--but in order to do that, we didn't want--the Founder wanted us to go out in there--but just be one of everyone else, not to be separated by dress. So one of the reasons for--one of the things in our religious orders was to take a really good look at the pre-Vatican practices that were really monastic practices for women in a cloistered community, and to look at how you could adjust that or open that up so that it would be more--it could reach people more in a special way. And some of the things that we talked about in the early days was the fact that even the children were afraid of us because of the way we were dressed, and not necessarily warm up to us--especially if you are in public. So that--what came about was really looking and examining some of the religious practices that we had that no longer matched the needs of the civilization or the society that we had at--as time evolved in society.

[01:23:27.26] SHANNON GREEN: Could you also just describe then a little bit--some of the broader changes for the Church at large that happened as a result?

[01:23:35.03] SISTER BRENDA LAU: Some of the broader changes had to do with the way we celebrated liturgy. You know, the altars were turned back around to invite the people to participate more--you're not looking at a back of a priest. We still have a ways to go, but that was a beginning. They looked at turning around the structure of the way the people faced the front of the altar. People, men and women, began to participate in the liturgical services in serving. The prayers were changed from Latin to English so it was in the vernacular, so that the people could participate and understand what was happening. Work was done on the homily, so it really would be instructive--and they're still working on that--to the people. And then we diversified in many ways--with the needs of the many different types of communities. And we know today reaching out to the disenfranchised and the marginalized--that they are part of the Church, and they have a place in the Church. So some of that has evolved along the way. Yes.

[01:24:43.25] KELBY THWAITS: That's great. All of that's great.

[01:24:46.00] SHANNON GREEN: So then maybe that is a good bridge into talking about--could you what a parish might look like today in this post-Vatican world, and then some of the roles of like--what a staff might look like, and some of the ministries, and participation I think [unintelligible].

[01:25:04.17] SISTER BRENDA LAU: A "parish" is a unit--usually geographical, in an area--that--I think we are in Los Angeles as well as in Hawaii. And usually the men and women and children from that area usually come to that church in that area, and that church is part of a bigger system in what we call a "diocese". A "diocese" is an area that has--in our case--one Bishop--I think in LA you have Archbishops--but we only have one Bishop, and he's a kind of shepherd for all of--we have sixty-seven parishes in the diocese of Honolulu on seven islands. And there sometimes--Oahu, which is where Honolulu is, has the most parishes. And because of the size the parishes are divided into groups, which we call "vicariates". And so there will be three or four parishes together in which, besides working in your own little parish, you also relate and share with the leadership with the other parishes and you bring back ideas, you share opportunities, you share personnel if possible when you can. Now the parish unit itself usually depends a lot on volunteers. The parish doesn't seem to have enough funds to pay everybody. So we have just wonderful people who give their time and talent and treasure. So then the volunteers fall into various committees. Some are on what we call the leadership part of the parish known as the Pastoral Council. And then there's a Finance Committee, which is mandated by the diocese to help run the parish. In the parish office you often have a Secretary, a Pastor, and an Administrative Assistant. And it's for keeping the records, working--relating to the parishioners needs--and in the parish itself you have a committee for funerals, a committee for the liturgy, a choir--we have services to the home-bound,

services to hospitals, that type of thing. So all of these different committees in which the administrator and--with the Pastoral Council--helps organize to bring services to everyone in need in the area, or across the areas where needed.

[01:27:44.11] [Director's comments].

[01:29:56.29] SISTER BRENDA LAU: I entered at a time when we were still pretty much following some of the rituals or structures that we had--just as we were changing from pre-Vatican to Vatican [II]. So we were sixty-one women that entered in '61. And by the time we received the habit we were forty-eight women. And by the time we were ready for final vows we were down to nineteen. And part of the system--of the system at the time was to have a month's reflection before we all went off. At this time we were invited to do our perpetual vows in our own home parishes. So before this was--before we did that, we had this month's reflection, and these were the nineteen women--I believe there are nineteen here--that were in that reflection period--which we took a picture just before we all went out to do our final vows. And what's interesting in this picture is that, if you look at the picture, there are three women in each of the rows that still remain in the order as of today. And I need to explain that two are not--no longer with us, but only because they went to God. So in the first row, you will notice myself, Sister Teresa Cavalli, Sister Judy [Wright??]--and you know that both Sister Teresa and Sister Judy are here in the administration for the province and leadership. In the second row, Sister Carol Braun, who is in your Property Management and car office, and Sister Jeanette Van Vleck (1943-2003), which is here [points] and Sister Nancy Monroe have gone to God. Nancy was the latest one who passed. And in the last row, we have Sister Lois Ann Linenberger, who was the former Administrative Assistant in the Provincialate, Sister Charlene Del Bianco, who is in San Diego helping in a school, and Sister Janet Duffy, who is at Lakewood [CA] serving. So there are three women in the row that still is within our group here in Los Angeles--those of us who entered in 1961 to the--for Los Angeles. And I was the only one from Hawaii. A woman entered with me but she left before this period of time.

[01:32:39.18] SHANNON GREEN: Could you say a little about the habit that you're wearing, or that--

[01:32:42.06] SISTER BRENDA LAU: We're all in suits, you notice? At that time we had just changed, because this is 1969. And I think I said earlier, it was about '67 and '69 that the Sisters began to change. So we were in the first group that all of us decided yes, we would move into the non-traditional habit. And--but at that time we were wearing suits in either brown, blue or black. And--or a dress of that nature. So that's how come you see--and we were still wearing a modified veil at the time, and so that's why we look as we do in this picture.

[01:33:23.02] SHANNON GREEN: Where was the picture taken?

[01:33:25.11] SISTER BRENDA LAU: The picture was taken at [Saint] Martin of Tours [Church, Brentwood, California]. We had our months reflection there in that house that was there--I don't know if it's still there or not. But--and that's where the picture was taken. They tell us it was Cary Grant's house at one time. [Internet search reveals that it was actually an orchard on the former estate of actor Gary Cooper.] I don't know how true, but that's what they say. [laughs].

[01:33:45.21] [Director's comments].

[01:34:27.16] SISTER BRENDA LAU: [Pointing at photo, left to right, starting with front row] This is Sister Brenda Lau, Sister Teresa Cavalli, Sister Judith Wright. And the next row--I'm naming the

Sisters that are still here--I don't remember the names of everybody else. Sister Carol Braun, Sister Jeanette Van Vleck, Sister Nancy Monroe, Sister Lois Linenberger, Sister Charlene Del Bianco, and Sister Janet Duffy.

[01:34:58.24] [Director's comments].

[01:35:11.06] End of interview.